Introduction to Age UK and our engagement work
Contents

Foreword

1
Introduction to Age UK and our engagement work

2
What is engagement?

3
Practical examples of engagement methods

4
Community engagement – case studies

5
Useful resources
Welcome to this Age UK Engagement Toolkit. It has been created for you. If you are an older person, then we believe that there will be something here to help you make a difference both to your own personal world and to the wider world around you.

We are living in a world where older people matter. Already there are more of us who are over 60 than under 16. By 2020, almost 20 per cent of the population will be over 60. Your vote, your role in society, your skills and experience already matter – and will increasingly matter. This toolkit will enable you to build on your qualities and potential, and will enable you to make a difference.

We are living in, and contributing to, a world that is changing – and you matter in that world, whoever you are. Almost one in ten of us is a member of the black and minority ethnic community. At least one in 20 of us is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. In today’s world we are not necessarily married and living with a partner – one in three households have just one member. We are a diverse, changing society, and this toolkit will enable you to make a difference to this new, changing society.

We are living in a world where some of us have wealth and living standards that are higher than those who are younger. We enjoy pensions and have benefits that are already not easily attainable by those who are younger. We now have the opportunity to work beyond what was the enforced retirement age. We are increasingly living much longer than our parents and grandparents.

Yet not all of us share in this good life. Most of us retire on inadequate incomes. If we are unemployed in our 50s, it is likely to be difficult to find employment. When our health deteriorates, living alone is a challenge. As we get older, our partner may require care; adequate support might be difficult to obtain, and might be costly and patchy in some areas. This toolkit will enable you to discover your rights and will help you to improve your situation when you are in need.

So, welcome to our Engagement Toolkit. We hope that there will be something here which will make you say ‘I couldn’t have done without it!’

Roger Newman
Member, Engagement Development Reference Group,
Age UK Co-founder, East Kent Independent Dementia Support,
and activist for older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people
Age UK, formed as a result of the merger between Age Concern and Help the Aged, has a rich heritage of engagement and involvement work with older people and organisations that work with older people at a local, regional and national level. We are an organisation that is focused on the needs, wants and aspirations of all older people.

Age UK has a dedicated Engagement & Volunteering team, based at Age UK’s Tavis House hub in central London. A key objective of the team is to embed good practice in engagement in all of Age UK’s work and to involve, engage and empower growing numbers of older people to make positive changes in their world.

Age UK is in a strong position to build upon our engagement work, thanks to the long and robust body of evidence created by Age Concern and Help the Aged over the past 60 years or so.

**Our values**

Age UK’s commitment to improve the lives of older people is based on its values and is at the heart of the services that we design and deliver.

1. **We are respectful.**  
We treat others as they would want to be treated.

2. **We are inclusive.**  
We work together, we involve and we consult.

3. **We are positive.**  
We welcome challenges and celebrate achievements.

4. **We are realistic.**  
We are open and truthful, while remaining ambitious.

5. **We are solutions-focused.**  
We ensure that what we do makes a real difference.

6. **We are expert.**  
We strive to be the best at what we do.

7. **We are empowering.**  
We support others to achieve their goals.
**How we work**

We work directly with older people in many different ways.

We provide national support to, and work closely with, more than 85 friendship centres and special interest groups. Some groups have been going for over 25 years. Groups are started by an older person or persons who approach Age UK with an idea, and Age UK provides support to get the group up and running. Age UK provides public liability and a group constitution. Groups are an excellent way to network, make new friends, take up new hobbies and work with Age UK. The friendship centres are supported by Diana Davies (diana.davies@ageuk.org.uk). Alternatively, please email engagement@ageuk.org.uk or telephone 0800 169 80 80 and ask to speak to a member of the Engagement & Volunteering team.

Age UK supports 525 Speaking Up for Our Age forums across England through the Speaking Up for Our Age programme which was set up 12 years ago. The aim of the programme, and of these local forums, which are entirely independent of Age UK, is to give a voice to older people on matters that are important to them. What forums do depends on what members want: They are run by older people for older people. For example, they get involved in consultation, influencing and campaigning on local issues.

The forums are generally independent organisations with a constitution and a bank account. They are democratic, non party political and they set their own agenda. Forums are a hub of information about older people’s needs and local services. Most forums are established to benefit people in a particular locality, while some are set up to benefit people with similar interests, e.g. a black and minority ethnic group, or older lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. The forums are supported by Debbie Beale (debbie.beale@ageuk.org.uk).

We also support a national Black and Minority Ethnic Elder Forum, again supported by Debbie Beale.

Age UK also works with Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (OLGBT) networks, whose members are experts in campaigning. They deliver training and workshops, design and put together toolkits, and provide information and advice on issues relevant to their members.

Our local Age UK partners are crucial in extending the geographical coverage of delivery to services to older people. Age UK is committed to involving older people in many aspects of service design and delivery, to ensure that services meet their needs.

The opinions and experiences of forums and friendship centre members and wider Age UK contacts as service users are highly valued by Age UK. Their views are sought in research, consultation and collaboration projects.

Age UK’s volunteering team provides advice, guidance, support and training to develop effective, fulfilling and safe volunteering experiences for volunteers who work with Age UK and its partners.
The Involving Older People Network was set up by Age Concern in 2005. The partnership brought together Age Concern federation members, older people and practitioners to share good practice. It enables older people to directly champion involvement of older people in everything that affects their lives. Audrey Brightwell, Co-chair since 2006, said in the early days of the Network: ‘The very existence of the Network keeps awareness high of the issues and complexities around meaningful involvement of older people.’

We welcome contact with new groups and networks to both strengthen our own reach and to connect groups to promote shared learning, expertise, research, engagement tools and collaborative working. We recognise that older people have many strengths to help improve their world. As volunteers, by holding positions such as trustees and/or chairperson of a group or organisation and as service users, volunteers are able to identify what needs to be changed.

For further information, please email engagement@ageuk.org.uk

The Age UK Engagement Toolkit

This toolkit has been developed in collaboration with representatives of the Involving Older People Network and by Roger Newman of Age UK’s Engagement Development Reference Group. The reference group has representatives from older people’s groups and age-sector organisations that engage with Age UK.

Engagement work is now a key part of everyday life. The purpose of this toolkit is twofold.

- If you are an individual wanting to engage about issues that concern you, or part of a group or organisation looking to develop activities, it offers a starting point for anyone wanting to develop a dialogue in their community to understand needs, wants and aspirations.

- It aims to share our growing range of resources and case studies with individuals, forums, older people’s groups and organisations already involved in campaigning.

There are many different types of engagement method available – in our initial search we found over 80. Here, we have selected a range of examples to help you to involve a small group or your wider community in getting together for a discussion or to take action. We offer an ‘Engagement checklist’ (see Figure 2, page 15) to help you create a plan of action.

This toolkit does not replicate existing Age UK toolkits and resources – for details of other resources (and their contacts), please see Chapter 5 ‘Useful resources’.
Find out more

Most of us feel inspired by hearing how older people have changed or improved a service in their area. We have provided a few examples of how older people have made a change.

To find your nearest local Age UK, friendship centre, special interest group or Speaking Up for Our Age Forum, please visit www.ageuk.org.uk and click on the ‘Get Involved’ tab. For those not online, please call 020 3033 0501 or 020 3033 0502 and ask to speak to a member of the Engagement & Volunteering team.

For additional help, please also refer to the ‘For Professionals’ area of our website for a wealth of information that may help you. You will find useful statistics, access to research and email addresses to contact Age UK experts. To find out more, please visit www.ageuk.org.uk/professional-resources-home, or see the link at the top of the Age UK website homepage.

Age UK has developed tools and resources to help people address issues that concern them. The Engagement team will strive to develop and promote new tools and relevant information through our networks, our website and the Engagement newsletter, to keep you informed and to better inform your engagement work. For more information, please see Chapter 5, ‘Useful resources’.
What is engagement?
Engagement refers to the many different ways in which a ‘community’ is involved in, or participates in, aspects of an organisation’s activities. For local communities, it often means being able to have a say about the quality or lack of local services. This can be at various levels of involvement – from being consulted about a plan or community needs, to being involved in decision-making and agenda-setting.

What are the potential benefits?

There are many potential benefits for all concerned when organisations engage with their community.

• Organisations can learn from their service users (or potential users), ensuring that services provided are fit for purpose.

• They can improve relationships with the community.

• They can enhance the organisation’s reputation and their influence, by demonstrating their closeness to their target group.

• They may find ways to reach groups who might not otherwise access their services.

• Client satisfaction can be improved.

• Engagement with service users can provide staff with a greater sense of purpose and a fuller sense of how their work impacts on the community.

• Many older people want to engage, to be a part of their community, and to have a say in things that affect them.

• Older people who get involved can feel an increased sense of purpose, ownership or usefulness.

• Older people may also benefit by learning and developing new skills, increasing their enjoyment of life, boosting their confidence, and improving their health and wellbeing.

• Communities can benefit from people having a shared sense of values and commitment.

Sometimes it seems as though services suit the people providing the service more than the intended recipient. This demonstrates one of the core reasons why organisations and agencies may wish to engage with a community: to ensure that services meet needs and are fit for purpose. Organisations can use this to improve relationships with service users and to improve the organisation’s profile.

Engagement is most likely to be successful when the following conditions apply.

• Careful consideration is given to overcoming potential barriers to engagement for older people and organisations.

• All possible efforts are made to include those who are not normally included in consultations (those who are ‘hard to reach’). ‘Hard to reach’ can mean people who are not able to get out to meetings due to age or disability, and people whose first language is not English. See ‘How can you reach those least likely to engage?’ below.

How can people get involved?

Figure 1 demonstrates the importance of participation. It shows different methods of engagement and the desired objectives. In the third column of Figure 1 (overleaf), a case study of the launch of a new bus service works through the different stages of the participation methods, as an example of how to apply your experience to each stage.
## Methods of engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Methods of engagement</th>
<th>Engagement activity objective</th>
<th>Case study: The launch of the Louth town bus service (details near end of Toolkit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information-giving and information-gathering</td>
<td>To provide people with information to assist their understanding, or to gather general information. This helps people take the action that they need to in order to achieve their goal</td>
<td>A member of Louth and District Seniors’ Forum researched the costs of a town bus, possible funding sources, a possible route, and similar services in nearby towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultation</td>
<td>To obtain reactions to specific policies or proposals</td>
<td>The campaign started with informal two-way contact with county council transport officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer feedback</td>
<td>To get a sense of what older people feel in relation to products and services</td>
<td>A questionnaire was devised, distributed and analysed, to determine what was needed in different parts of the town</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>To bring people into active partnership and agree sharing of resources and decision-making</td>
<td>Negotiations followed with key transport people and the chair of the Government’s Commission for Rural Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civic engagement – leading to empowerment</td>
<td>To support older people in being directly involved in decision-making locally, regionally and nationally in statutory and other structures</td>
<td>Local councillors were emailed, a Bus Roundtable was set up (comprising local councillors, council officers, residents, representatives of bus companies and various local groups, including the Seniors’ Forum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social engagement</td>
<td>To ensure participation in community life to create a positive impact on wellbeing and independence</td>
<td>Residents and local groups came together to discuss their own experiences and suggestions for improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experts by experience</td>
<td>To acknowledge and act upon people’s own knowledge and experience to improve/tailor the services they receive</td>
<td>Local people used local knowledge to improve a local service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>To ensure feedback on outcome of process and to evaluate process experience and ongoing success</td>
<td>The success of the project shows how local residents and the Seniors’ Forum persevered over a three-year period to achieve their objective. Accountability also means ensuring that people use the service, so as not to lose it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Useful tools to help with your project planning

**Tool:** A mandate for involvement

**Time needed:** 30 minutes

**Appropriate forum:**
An exercise that can be completed individually or in any group setting

This simple tool takes the form of a template that can be completed by either an individual or in a group. It will enable an organisation to capture the main points of an involvement project. This basic information can then act as a mandate for involvement, helping you to justify your methods and intentions. Your group (or individual) should consider all the following areas before you complete the mandate template. An example is given overleaf.

Building a bank of simple mandate documents like this can also provide you with a quick historical reference of planned involvement projects. This can be really useful when measuring success against the objectives set out in any strategy document, or measuring developments in the ambition and purpose of your involvement work over time.
**A mandate for involvement – example**

1. **Identity** Who are you, in the context of this piece of work? A whole organisation, a sub-committee or department, a single officer etc.?

   *We, Age Concern Bournemouth’s (ACB) Information and Advice service need to understand the views of*

2. **Target(s) for involvement** Who do you want to involve? Any local citizen, people from particular sections of the community, stakeholders representing community groups etc.?

   *both current and potential service users, incorporating BME communities concerning*

3. **The issue** What do you want to ask those you involve? Is it a broad issue concerning your whole organisation? Is it about a specific project or service? Are you trying to gain knowledge to help you influence another organisation?

   *possible gaps in our present I&A service, e.g. I&A outreach sessions so that*

4. **The actor(s)** Who is responsible for carrying out or implementing what you decide? This may be the same as the ‘identity’ but not necessarily.

   *ACB and I&A management can*

5. **Action** What will the actor have to do to implement what is decided? This will not be clear until after decisions are made, but you can plan in terms of the time and resources the actor may need and you can plan for reporting, feeding back and evaluation etc.

   *tailor their service to suit the needs and wants of the community on/by*

6. **Dates** When does the actor need to take action by? The work associated with what comes out of your involvement activities may be ongoing but building in deadlines can be useful to ensure that action is taken in good time. Those you involve will also be keen to see when they can expect action or feedback.

   *one year after pilot completion in order to achieve*

7. **Overall objective** What is it that you would like to accomplish through this particular piece of involvement work?

   *the goal of filling any potential gaps and providing a full service to all members in the community who may not presently be able to access our service. To strive to be as inclusive as possible.*
A mandate for involvement – template

Main points

1. Identity

2. Target(s) for involvement

3. The issue

4. The actor(s)

5. Action

6. Dates

7. Overall objective
**How can you reach those least likely to engage?**

The term ‘hard to reach’ is used in many different contexts. Sometimes it is used to refer to ethnic minority groups. It can also be used to refer to ‘hidden populations’, such as those in care homes. At other times it may refer to broader segments of the population, such as people with disabilities.

‘Hard to reach’ is a term often used in the context of social marketing. This is a consumer-focused approach that believes nobody is impossible to reach; it just depends on the approach taken. It may be more expensive to reach some people, but it is important to put more effort and creativity into reaching these groups.

It is important to acknowledge that attitudinal aspects can be a contributing factor. For example, people could be hard to reach because they think an organisation does not care about them, does not listen or even is irrelevant to them. Attitudes such as these can be even harder to overcome than demographic aspects.

Hard-to-reach groups include:
- primary carers
- high-rise apartment dwellers
- faith-based communities
- residents of hostels and boarding houses
- residents of sheltered housing or care homes
- some rural populations
- frail older people who find it difficult to leave their homes.

Other barriers to engagement include:
- low literacy levels
- access to (and capability to work with) IT
- language and cultural barriers
- access to transport
- shift work or seasonal events
- use of technical jargon
- apathy – why is it relevant to me?
Some groups of people, in particular those who are asked regularly to respond to service reviews, are becoming over-consulted and increasingly reluctant to participate.

There are also people who would like to have a say in local issues, but who do not know how to access council processes. There are unresponsive people, such as the time poor (those who are in full-time work or are full-time carers); people who have a low commitment to the area or no vested interest in local issues (e.g. renters); and disengaged people who are disillusioned with, or feel disconnected from, the political process.

However, having a list of identified groups is not necessarily a useful tool in recognising and establishing relationships with hard-to-reach people, especially as certain groups may be hard to reach in some contexts or locations but not in others. A more fruitful approach is to define characteristics of hard-to-reach groups and link these to successful approaches to contact or involve them.

**Do you know your local population?**

**Can you identify groups that are hidden?**

Resources to help you include:

- Office for National Statistics (www.statistics.gov.uk) survey data
- Neighbourhood Statistics website (www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk)
- local authority websites and community plans.

Use the flowchart in Figure 2 (opposite) to project-manage your engagement activities.
What is the purpose of the engagement exercise?

Does information already exist on the issue?
(You may be able to join forces with other groups)

- **YES**

Are there gaps in the information?
Does this require further consultation?

- **YES**

What resources are available? What is the budget? Who needs to be targeted?
What is the best method(s) to use? Can you work with other groups? Is the timescale realistic? Is this the best time to consult?

## Discuss best options, e.g. surveys or focus groups/public meetings:

**e.g. Surveys**

- Is the questionnaire well designed, clear and concise?
- Has the questionnaire been piloted?
- Will the results be valid?
- Is the survey inclusive?
- Is a freepost address included?
- Has consideration been given to providing an incentive?

**e.g. Focus groups/public meetings**

- Is the event well publicised and timely?
- Have the most effective means of recruitment been used?
- Is the event inclusive?
- Has consideration been given to location, access, time, carer’s expenses, travel expenses, interpretation?

Implement consultation exercise.

Analyse results, ensure that they are used in making decisions and provide feedback.

Evaluate the effectiveness of the consultation exercise.

Don’t forget to share good news through radio, press articles, your newsletter and those of other organisations.
What resources will you need?

Make a list of what will be helpful and who can be approached to do the different tasks.

Decide whether you will need:

- a venue for meetings
- a chair and secretary
- a skills audit of people in a group, so you can use people most effectively
- a communications strategy and access to the internet
- someone to liaise with the press
- details of where you can go for help.

Who is your audience?

Take a look at your community. Have you included everyone who should be included?

For public meetings or events, have you considered providing interpreters for those in your community whose first language is not English, an accessible venue for disabled and less mobile people, and hearing loops for deaf people or those who are hard of hearing? Minority communities include travellers and gypsies; lesbian, gay and bisexual individuals; and those not physically able to get to meetings.

Questionnaires, telephone calls or face-to-face visits are alternatives to public meetings. Keep questionnaires short and to the point, allow space for people to write their comments, and plan how these will be included in the analysis of responses. Use hard-copy and email versions. Ensure that there is a freepost address.

Consider transport links to your venue. Early start times for meetings are not welcome for those who need to use travel permits that are not valid until after a certain time. Travel in rush hour at either end of the day may discourage some older people from attending meetings.

Have you considered including street wardens in your group? They know who is less likely (or who is unable) to come to public meetings. They are a known and trusted face in their communities, and can also help to identify people who may be directly affected by your campaign and whose opinions are important. Street wardens are checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB).

Your local Age UK may have lunch clubs that you can include in focus groups or interviews. They will tell you what home services they provide and might agree to distributing questionnaires for you through their service providers.

The ‘Engagement checklist’ in Figure 2 offers useful questions to get you thinking about the many different considerations involved. Keep revisiting it, to ensure that your objectives remain on track and that your outcomes are the desired ones.
How will you reach your audience?

All people in later life should be informed about engagement opportunities, so a wide range of media needs to be used.

Useful places to publicise your activities include:

- local community magazines, newspapers, radio stations, websites
- libraries, post offices, bookmakers, surgeries, hospital waiting rooms, bus stations and buses, shops, pubs, churches and noticeboards
- through social workers, service providers, district nurses, day centres
- all local voluntary organisations and community groups.

Find out if other local groups print newsletters. They may be happy to include an article to help promote your activity or event.

Can you afford to engage?

You will need to make a plan and identify all possible costs before deciding whether you can afford to start your campaign or project. If you are new to public engagement work, why not ask your local forum or Age UK for advice?

Taking action costs money. Any type of activity will incur costs, whether you decide to hold a public meeting or focus group, or carry out a survey.

Here are some things to consider.

- What is your budget?
- How long will the activity take?
- Will you need to pay for professional help or advice?
- Can you afford to incentivise participants in a focus group, if that is what you choose to do?
- How will you market your activity?
- Who can help you?
- What will be the cost of producing written or other survey materials?
- How much will distribution of materials cost?
- What costs will be involved in collating the information?

If engagement is to be successful, serious thought, effort, money and practical resources need to be committed. But this investment will be offset by benefits.
What method will you use?

Ways of involving your community range from providing information, to holding a consultation event that enables people to be involved in decision-making, to using technology in different ways.

In Chapter 3, ‘Practical examples of engagement methods’, we describe a range of participation methods, together with indications of their advantages, risks and costs. To help you decide if a particular method is right for your campaign, the description of each method follows a set format, covering:

• what each participation method is best suited for
• the intended audience
• likely costs
• the amount of time that will be required
• the expected outcome(s)
• when you should not use it.

The description of each method, particularly potential costs and time required, should help you decide on the method that best suits your particular financial situation and related time constraints.

On the following page are two examples of good practice in a participative approach.
**Case study:**

**Get the Picture**

A good example of a participative project designed and conducted exclusively by older people in a rural community is the Age Concern Oxfordshire Get the Picture research and report. Among the aims of this project were to capture in words and pictures the everyday lives of a typical rural English community – partly to capture the memories of older people in West Oxfordshire, but also to pass on to the rest of the community their stories, wisdom and experience. Thus, the community had a valuable resource, which might otherwise have been lost and forgotten, and the participants had a role to play in their community, by researching and recording their results, as well as an end result in the form of an illustrated book.

**Case study:**

**Opening Doors London**

Engagement can have benefits for minority groups too. For example, the Opening Doors London project led by Age UK Camden offers social events for older members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. These activities include film shows, lunches and guided walks; but further activities have included counselling and buddy schemes. This in turn gives a feeling of safety and belonging, and encourages members of the groups to be more proactive within the wider community, representing LGBT needs.

**Can individuals make a difference?**

It is difficult, as an individual, to bring about change. Our suggestion would be to visit www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/older-peoples-forums to find a local group that can offer help and advice.

**How will you evaluate the project?**

Planning the evaluation of your project must be discussed and agreed at the planning stages of your project. There is no point in embarking on a campaign or project if you cannot measure its success.

So, you know that you want to tackle a burning issue, but you need to get started. Be clear on what it is you want to achieve and how you will know if you have achieved it. This might sound obvious, but you should think about what success looks like and how it will be measured. You might consider revisiting the issue in a year’s time to assess what has happened.

In the case of the Louth town bus service (see Figure 1 above), if people stop using the service, then the project will fail. The team who started the project carried out their initial research by using a questionnaire. They might consider carrying out a further survey a year down the line, to measure the success of the bus service.
**Is feedback useful?**

Regular feedback throughout the consultation shows appreciation and maintains interest. Forums have plenty of valuable experience and ideas for good practice regarding feedback.

All participants should be asked about their experience of being consulted. For instance, a simple evaluation form could be handed out at focus groups and collected as people leave. What you learn from the evaluation forms will help you to improve the experience for your next campaign.

**How can you publicise your achievements?**

Don’t forget to let people in the wider community know what you have achieved.

- Write an article for your local newspaper.
- Get a slot on a local radio station.
- Do a TV interview on a local news programme.
- Visit local older people’s groups to talk about how you went about it, to encourage more people into action.

Who did you consult or work with along the way?

- Your council or local businesses? Can you use your experience to help them better engage with older people in the future?
- Have they got a reference group that you can be part of in the future?
- If not, can you help them set one up?

Finally, do let Age UK know about your work.
Practical examples of engagement methods
Practical examples of engagement methods

We have discussed why involvement and engagement are important. However, it is equally important to decide what engagement method should be used to effect change. This section describes a range of participation methods, together with indications of advantages, risks and costs.

We have found a huge range of methods. Some may already be familiar to you, such as focus groups. We have also included examples that you may be unfamiliar with, and some that you may never use. However, we want to share the wide range of available participation techniques. The internet also provides cost-effective ways of gauging opinions through registering opinions via text messaging.

Peopleandparticipation.net helps people who work in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors and who need to involve a wider group of people in their work. The site provides information, advice, case studies and opportunities to share experiences with others; we hope that this will help you to make your public participation activities as effective as possible.

The site is mainly aimed at people who are directly involved in planning, running or commissioning public participation activities. For example, this includes:

- civil servants working in central and local government
- community development workers and other public-sector front-line workers
- elected officials in central and local government
- professionals and volunteers working with participation in the community and voluntary sectors
- professionals working in the ‘public participation field’, i.e. those delivering or advising on participation activities for others as consultants
- professionals working in the private sector in corporate social responsibility and related issues.

While the site has not been designed for citizens in general, it will still be useful for members of the public who are interested in participation and would like to learn more about how authorities and voluntary organisations engage with the public.

Click through to ‘browse methods’ on the ‘methods tab’ on the homepage of www.peopleandparticipation.net for contact details for each method (and many more) and restrictions in copyright use or go direct from www.peopleandparticipation.net/display/Methods/Browse+Methods

The various participation methods described below cover:

- providing information – area forums
- consultation – community development; focus groups; Open Space Technology
- involving people – dialogue; customer journey-mapping; deliberative polling; deliberative workshops
- devolving decision-making – participatory appraisal; participatory budgeting
- new technology – blogs; virtual worlds; 21st Century Town Meetings; webcasting.
Area forums

Description
Area forums are meetings held in a locality, often by the local council. The meetings are often attended by local councillors, together with senior representatives from the local authorities, the police, primary care trusts and other key local organisations, to debate key topics and answer residents’ questions face-to-face.

Area forum workshops are normally run in the evenings. The session is chaired by a local councillor. A senior council officer also attends each meeting and ensures that the recommendations made are properly fed back into the council’s decision-making processes.

Area forums concentrate their conversations on the topics of particular concern to local communities in the area.

The outcomes are reported to area forum members, either on an individual basis or via an area forum newsletter, which is sent out to members after each meeting. The minutes of each meeting are normally made available online.

Normally you do not have to be a member of an area forum to attend, but you are encouraged to join, so that you can be updated about meetings and what happens as a direct result of your input.

Uses
Area forums provide their members with:

• information on council services and council policies affecting the local area
• the opportunity to give their input on issues that affect their neighbourhood
• a mechanism to have their say on any issue related to council business
• the opportunity to raise actions and monitor that they are carried out.

Suitable participants
Area forums are made up of a cross-section of the local community, normally divided by ward, including:

• local residents
• local businesses
• local amenity society and residents’ association representatives
• members of other local groups, including tenant management organisations, special interest groups, voluntary organisations
• representatives of the local police and health authorities.
Cost
• Low–medium: council buildings or community centres are the normal venue. Costs are incurred in staff time for planning and attending the meetings as well as responding and feeding back to participants.

Time requirements
Area forums are an ongoing process of engagement with the local community. Each forum meets every two or three months.

What they can deliver
Use area forums to:
• give local people information about new policies and legislation that will affect the local area
• find out what local people think about a new development in the area
• find out what issues are most important to local people.

What they cannot deliver
Do not use area forums when you want:
• to make a decision on the local area
• a representative sample of the local population
• to engage hard-to-reach groups.

Strengths
• Area forums encourage openness and transparency around council decisions.
• Discussions can be tailored to the concerns of local residents.
• Area forums provide a direct interface between elected representatives and the communities they represent.

Weaknesses
• Area forums tend to be attended by the ‘usual suspects’, although many try hard to attract young people and residents from black and minority ethnic communities in particular.
• Individual workshops may be dominated by one person or a particular viewpoint.

Origin
Area forums have grown out of community meetings that have been held across the UK for decades.
Community development

Description
Community development is a long-term approach of building active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. Moreover, it is about changing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives and enabling the community itself to develop solutions to problems.

Community development is not a typical participation method, as it is based on long-term work in communities, rather than one-off or short-term interventions. Other methods of participation often form part of a wider community development approach.

Community development workers work alongside individuals, groups and organisations principally within communities that are marginalised and excluded due either to their geographical location or as a community of interest (e.g. young people, migrant communities, black and minority ethnic communities).

Community development challenges the notion that solutions to local problems are found outside communities themselves, and it seeks to identify and develop the skills and confidence of local people to address issues that they define.

Community development involves starting with the issues that people in communities identify as being important to them, rather than starting with the issues that an outside agency wants to tackle.

It is essentially concerned with helping people to understand why the issues they want to tackle have come about, and why some groups have more power or resources than others.

Uses
Community development is used particularly in disadvantaged areas or with sections of the population who are at risk of exclusion, who are facing difficult conditions or who need to overcome oppression and inequality.

Relationships of groups to other community members, other local groups or organisations in the locality and to public authorities and private sector organisations are key to community development in practice.

Suitable participants
Community development can work across all communities, but it is focused more on communities experiencing poverty, disadvantage and/or discrimination.

Cost
As with any community-based intervention, costing a community development project will vary depending on a number of factors including, but not limited to:

- the concerns and issues to be tackled
- the level (e.g. for one group; the immediate neighbourhood; the entire strategic area) at which activities are focused, as well as the type of activities that need to be undertaken
- the desired number of participants
- the intended outputs/outcomes.

Additionally, to develop effective community action requires support from skilled practitioners who have access to support and other resources.
Time requirements
Community development is a long-term process – working with communities involves building trust, raising self-esteem and boosting confidence, as well as overcoming barriers to participation and conflict.

What it can deliver
Community development is an essential component of community engagement and community empowerment. It has been argued that without community development, other forms of community action are unlikely to be sustainable. By creating confident communities, it helps to develop active citizens who are involved in the democratic process. It offers support to communities, as they develop their own solutions to local problems.

What it cannot deliver
Community development is a long-term process, particularly because of its focus on people, and aims to create long-term change. It is not about recruiting volunteers or volunteering in itself, as those who participate in community development work are often those who have no spare time or resources and are forced into taking action because they have no choice. It is not the answer to everything, but it can be used effectively to meet targets on regeneration, health inequalities, engaging children and young people, etc.

Strengths
• It is more inclusive than many other approaches and is concerned with issues identified by the communities themselves rather than by external agencies.
• It has the potential to create more active citizens through informal learning and awareness-raising.
• It can ensure more effective partnership working and recognition for non-professional expertise in decision-making.
• It can help overcome conflicts within and between communities, leading to greater cohesion.

Weaknesses
• It is often used as a short-term solution for policy/strategic problems, which curtails its effectiveness and true value.
• It retains a negative image and is perceived as a threat to institutional stability.
• It does not have an extensive or well-recognised evidence base.

Origin
Community development was developed in the US in the 1960s, in response to long-standing issues in deprived communities.
Focus groups

**Description**
Focus groups are guided discussions of a small group of citizens. They are normally one-off sessions, although several may be run simultaneously in different locations.

A facilitator leads a guided discussion of 6–12 people on a specific topic. A typical focus group normally lasts one or two hours and is normally recorded. A report on the process and results is produced and then distributed to all the participants. The focus group may be watched by the person who has commissioned the work or other interested parties.

Focus groups provide useful information on how people respond to particular questions or issues, but the short amount of time limits the depth of discussion that can be had.

**Uses**
Focus groups allow for an in-depth discussion on a specific topic with a few people over a couple of hours. They allow the client to have a greater understanding of what may lie behind an opinion or how people approach an issue.

**Suitable participants**
Members of the focus group can be selected to be representative of the population at large or of a specific group of the population. It can be a good way of engaging marginalised groups. The group needs to be small for participants to feel comfortable about voicing their views.

**Cost**
- Medium–low.
- The cost of focus groups is generally not very high, unless you need to recruit participants through truly random selection, which can be costly.
- An incentive may have to be offered to citizens in order to get them to participate in the focus group.
- Additional costs include venue hire (choose an informal setting where possible), catering, and supporting arrangements, such as childcare.

**Time requirements**
- Minimal.
- The focus group event itself is relatively short, but do not overlook the time required to plan the event, recruit the participants and write up and respond to the results of the focus group.
- If the topic for discussion is complex or largely unknown to the participants, you may need to provide reading in advance.

**What they can deliver**
Use focus groups when you:
- want participants to interact in a small group
- are looking to explore the views of the wider population or specific groups
- need to understand the views of groups who would not normally respond to written questionnaires or consultations
- want to get the views (through the use of translators) of people who are not native English speakers.
Practical examples of engagement methods

What they cannot deliver
Do not use focus groups if you:

• are looking for a detailed exploration of an issue, as some people feel that focus group discussions do not allow enough time to discuss things in depth

• are looking for quantitative or fully representative results

• want to make a decision through participation.

Strengths
• There may be a high level of participant interaction, due to the small size of the group.

• Focus groups can lead to a greater understanding of how people think about issues.

• Members can be specially recruited to fit (demographic) profiles.

• Focus groups are good for getting opinions from people who would not be prepared to give written answers.

• Focus groups can be useful for getting opinions from non-native speakers, using translators.

• Focus groups provide understanding of how people think about issues.

Weaknesses
• The group may be dominated by one or two people with strong opinions, who may unbalance the discussion. Some participants may feel inhibited about speaking.

• Responses are not quantitative, so cannot be used to gauge wider opinion.

• It may be difficult to find a suitable facilitator.

• The term ‘focus group’ has been used widely and may describe any small meeting of people.

Origin
Focus groups were developed in the private sector for market research. They are now widely used in the private, public and social research sectors.
Open Space Technology

Description
Open Space Technology (often referred to as ‘Open Space’) is a meeting framework that allows unlimited numbers of participants to form their own discussions around a central theme.

Participants identify issues for which they are willing to take responsibility for running a session. At the same time, these topics are distributed among available rooms and timeslots. When no more discussion topics are suggested, the participants sign up for the ones they wish to take part in.

Open Space creates very fluid and dynamic conversations held together by mutual enthusiasm or interest in a topic. A trained moderator can be useful, especially when people are used to more structured meeting methods.

The fundamental principles of Open Space are that:

• whoever comes are the right people (the best participants are those who feel passionately about the issue and have freely chosen to get involved)
• whenever it starts is the right time (Open Space encourages creativity both during and between formal sessions)

• when it’s over, it’s over (getting the work done is more important than adhering to rigid schedules)
• whatever happens is the only thing that could happen (participants are encouraged to let go of their expectations and pay full attention to what is happening here and now)
• if participants find themselves in a situation where they are not learning or contributing, they have a responsibility to go to another session or to take a break for personal reflection – known as the ‘Law of two feet’.

It is vital that there are good written reports from all discussions, complete with action points, available at the end of each day. Feedback and implementation structures are important to carry forward the suggestions after the event itself.

Uses
Open Space is good for harnessing the creativity that is stifled by more structured forms of meetings, and for creating new forms of working relationships, for example, cross-functional collaboration, self-managing teams, community-building, conflict resolution, and strategy development and implementation.

Suitable participants
Open Space is highly flexible in the number and nature of participants. It can be run with a handful of people or more than 2,000 participants.
Cost
Cost varies. The approach can be very cheap, but it requires a venue with space to accommodate all participants in one or more concentric circles.

Time requirements
Flexible – an event usually lasts between one and five days and can be run as a one-off event.

What it can deliver
Use Open Space when you:
• are involving large and diverse groups
• require creative thinking around an issue
• want an open discussion and collective decisions
• want to develop ownership over the results
• want to develop better working relationships
• want to build a sense of community.

What it cannot deliver
Do not use Open Space if:
• you are unwilling to give up control over the direction of the meeting
• you are not prepared to follow through with the recommendations
• the achievement of a predetermined, specific outcome is essential.

Strengths
• Open Space is an extremely flexible process.
• It is a participant-driven approach.
• It unleashes creativity.

Weaknesses
• Open Space cannot be used to direct people to a specific outcome.

Origin
Open Space Technology was created in the mid-1980s by US organisational consultant Harrison Owen, when he discovered that people attending his conferences showed more energy and creativity during the coffee breaks than the formal sessions. Open Space is structured in a way that recreates this informal and open atmosphere, combined with a clear sense of purpose.
Dialogue

**Description**
This is a good approach for resolving conflict and disagreements, building and improving relationships between groups with diverse opinions, and involving those who are often in danger of being excluded from decision-making.

Dialogue incorporates a range of approaches designed to help participants identify common ground and mutually beneficial solutions to a problem. The process involves stakeholders in defining the problem, devising the methods and creating the solutions.

Dialogue is mainly conducted through workshops and similar meetings. The minimum aim is to find a mutually acceptable compromise, but ideally the process seeks to build on common ground and reach a proactive consensus. Every dialogue process is tailor-made to suit the situation and the people involved, and to deliver the agreed outcomes.

**Uses**
Dialogue is used for conflict resolution or conflict avoidance in decision-making. It is good in areas likely to be regarded as controversial or where the facts are contested.

**Cost**
Due to the need for independent expert facilitation and possibly numerous meetings, the costs can be high. However, dialogue remains one of the few practicable participative options, once a conflict has reached a certain point.

Initiating a dialogue at an earlier stage can save enormous effort, resources (including cost) and anxiety later.

**Time requirements**
Dialogue projects tend to be most effective over a long period of time, due to the slow process of building relationships and trust between groups.

**What it can deliver**
Use dialogue:

- where there is conflict
- to proactively prevent conflict
- to build consensus in decision-making and shared ownership of outcomes
- when you want to build working relationships with interest groups that are normally excluded, or feel excluded, from decision-making
- when you want to improve communication and build trust between groups
- when a debate is required.

Dialogue can deliver:

- improved relationships between participants
- consensus/shared vision
- increased legitimacy for decisions
- better implementation of jointly developed solutions
- creative new solutions.
What it cannot deliver
Do not use dialogue when:

- the stakeholders are unable to influence decisions in any significant way
- essential groups (e.g. key decision-makers) refuse to join
- time and/or money is in short supply
- participants need to be demographically representative.

Dialogue cannot deliver:

- information that is representative of society as a whole
- quick results
- clearly identified positions, unless this is an explicit objective of the dialogue and the process is designed to identify these.

Weaknesses

- Dialogue is extremely reliant on the skills of a facilitator or mediator, which can make it expensive.
- It may also be time-consuming.
- The need to ensure participation by all significant stakeholders can slow progress – or even render it impossible.
- Ensuring communication between the stakeholder representatives and their constituencies is challenging.
- In using dialogue to achieve consensus, there is a risk that organisational and individual positions may not be explicitly acknowledged. The final outputs may only highlight areas of agreement and may not capture other parts of the picture. This is particularly problematic for campaigning organisations for which positions are important.

Strengths

- Dialogue deals well with contention and can really help with issues of low trust.
- It ensures a balanced approach to decision-making, allowing all voices to be heard.
- It is an approach that hands over the control of the process to the participants themselves.
- It develops jointly owned and jointly implemented solutions, often preventing the need for legal challenge or litigation at a later stage.
- It is highly flexible and can be applied at all levels of government.

Origin

Dialogue evolved from conflict resolution and mediation approaches in the US and the UK. It is commonly used in environmental decision-making, with growing use in other areas.
Customer journey-mapping

Description
Customer journey-mapping is a tool for visualising how customers interact with people and organisations in order to make a purchase or experience a service.

Customer journey-mapping can be used as a form of consultation to improve a service through finding out how people use the service and how they interact with the service provider. It provides a map of the interactions and emotions that take place, and can help an organisation to provide its customers with the experience it wants them to have.

Uses
It can help organisations to understand:

• how prospective and current customers use a service, and when they interact with staff and the system
• how customers perceive the organisation at each interaction, and how they would really like the customer experience to be
• how departments and functions need to work together
• the potential barriers and obstacles that customers encounter
• how to use this knowledge to design an optimal experience that meets the expectations of major customer groups and achieves competitive advantage.

What it can deliver
Customer journey-mapping can be used to:

• improve efficiency within an organisation or service
• gain an understanding from the perspective of the customer or service user
• identify the interdependencies of processes that interact with the customer
• identify the different perspectives and priorities of different user groups
• encourage a flexible approach to working, to ensure that the process remains aligned with service user needs.

What it cannot deliver
• It cannot deliver an understanding of the wider community, as only service users will be consulted.

Strengths
Customer journey-mapping can encourage a more participatory approach to service design and improvement.

Weaknesses
• Customer journey-mapping only works for specific services.
• It may not be seen externally as consultation or engagement.

Origin
Customer journey-mapping was developed in the corporate sector. It has links with market research and mystery shopping.

Suitable participants
Any customers or service users are suitable participants.

Cost
Medium – depending on whether the mapping is done in-house or by an external consultant.
### Deliberative polling

**Description**
A deliberative poll measures what the public would think about an issue if they had an adequate chance to reflect on the questions at hand. Deliberative polling observes the evolution of the views of a citizen test group as they learn more about a topic. It is more statistically representative than many other approaches, due to its large scale.

The participating sample is first polled on the targeted issues. After this baseline poll, members of the sample are invited to gather for a few days to discuss the issues. Balanced briefing materials are sent to the participants and made publicly available.

The participants engage in dialogue with competing experts, based on questions that the participants themselves develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. After this deliberation, the sample is asked the original questions again.

The resulting changes in opinion are thought to represent the conclusions that the public would reach if people had the opportunity to become more informed about the issues.

Deliberative polling creates dramatic, statistically significant changes in views. Follow-up studies, however, tend to show that some of these changes are reversed over time.

Deliberative polls are usually run in collaboration with TV companies, which then broadcast parts of the process, allowing the wider public to share the learning of the participants.

**Uses**
Deliberative polls measure informed opinion on an issue. The results of a deliberative poll are partly prescriptive – pointing to what informed and reflective citizens might want policy-makers to do.

**Suitable participants**
The number of participants in a deliberative polling process range from around 200 to 600. It is important that the participants constitute a representative sample of society; if a random selection process might exclude minority groups, there is a need for a more affirmative selection method.

**Cost**
It is hard to estimate what a deliberative poll might cost in the UK, as there have not been any recently, but we estimate that running one will cost at least £30,000 (excluding expenses for the media and participants).

**Time requirements**
Allow at least six months for setting up and running a deliberative poll.

The poll itself is run over several days. A few months before, the participants take part in a number of events (usually over a weekend) where they are polled and where they can familiarise themselves with the issues.
**What it can deliver**
Use a deliberative poll when you want to engage the public on issues about which they may have little knowledge or information about the trade-offs applying to public policy.

A deliberative poll can deliver a statistically representative view of what the public’s considered/deliberated opinion might look like, as well as increased public understanding of an issue through broadcasting of the event.

**What it cannot deliver**
Do not use a deliberative poll when the issue is uncontroversial or where the issue and its relevant trade-offs are already well understood by the public.

A deliberative poll will not deliver shared views or consensus, or improved relationships between groups of participants.

**Strengths**
A deliberative poll:

- combines the statistical representativeness of a scientific sample with interaction and deliberation

- offers better demographic representation than similar methods (such as citizens’ juries or consensus conferences)

- increases public understanding of the complexity of issues

- includes people who would not normally choose to get involved

- demonstrates the large difference between people’s uninformed and informed views

- is a good means of measuring the diversity of public opinion.

**Weaknesses**
- A deliberative poll requires use of television to achieve its wider public awareness-raising effects.

- It does not provide qualitative information.

- It is expensive.

- There is less scope for participants to identify witnesses and question them or determine the scope of the questions than there is for some other approaches (e.g. citizens’ juries or consensus conferences).

**Origin**
Deliberative polling was developed by US social researchers to overcome the often uninformed and fickle nature of opinion poll results.
**Deliberative workshops**

**Description**
Deliberative workshops are small-scale dialogue events where the focus is on deliberation.

Deliberative workshops are a form of facilitated group discussion that provide participants with the opportunity to consider an issue in depth, challenge each others’ opinions and develop their views and arguments to reach an informed end position. Deliberative workshops are similar to focus groups, although there tends to be more focus on deliberation. They can take anything from a few hours to several days to conduct.

**Uses**
Deliberative workshops allow for an in-depth discussion on a specific topic with a few people, usually over a couple of hours.

They allow the organisation conducting the event to have a greater understanding of what may lie behind an opinion or how people’s views change as they are given new information or as they deliberate on an issue.

**Suitable participants**
Deliberative workshops typically involve 8–16 participants. Who is involved will depend on the issue at stake; participants could be selected on the basis of demographics, interest group or random selection.

**Cost**
- Low–medium.
- The cost of deliberative workshops is generally not high, unless you need to recruit participants through truly random selection, which can be costly.

- An incentive may have to be offered to citizens in order to get them to participate in the workshop. Additional costs include venue hire (choose an informal setting where possible), catering and supporting arrangements, such as childcare.

- Sometimes a deliberative workshop reconvenes on several occasions. This adds to the cost and time requirement.
Time requirements
Minimal, unless the workshop takes place on several occasions.

What they can deliver
Deliberative workshops can be used to:
• gauge the informed opinion of a small group of people
• observe and track how people’s views and perspectives change through deliberation or as they receive information.

What they cannot deliver
• Deliberative workshops only involve small numbers of people and cannot therefore be used to gather statistically significant data that accurately measures public opinion.
• The fact that participants’ views are developed through deliberation may also mean that they are not representative of the views of the wider public.

Strengths
• Deliberative workshops allow participants the time and resources to consider an issue in depth, including costs, benefits and long-term consequences.
• Discussing with others gives participants an insight into other perspectives, allowing their own views to be developed and challenged.
• Deliberative workshops can build and improve relationships between participants.
• They can give participants new knowledge and skills.

Weaknesses
Like all forms of qualitative research, deliberative workshops are open to manipulation – how the discussions/activities are framed, how the participants are introduced to the topic, and what questions are asked will all influence the results.
Participatory appraisal

Description
Participatory appraisal is a broad empowerment approach that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages grassroots action. It uses a lot of visual methods, including: diagrams and pictures to aid analysis and discussion; mapping exercises – including community maps and body (or personal) maps, which visually represent a theme in a person’s life; comparisons – discussion of contrast and commonality, seeking diversity. These make it especially useful for participants who find other methods of participation intimidating or complicated.

The term ‘participatory appraisal’ describes a family of approaches that enable local people to identify their own priorities and make their own decisions about the future, with the organising agency facilitating, listening and learning.

Participatory appraisal uses visual and flexible tools to ensure that everyone can join in, regardless of background. It can be carried out in a place where people already meet in their everyday lives.

A commonly encountered problem is that as participatory appraisal uses very accessible tools, it is often used as an information-providing exercise that does not follow through to facilitate decision-making within the community.

Uses
In the short term, participatory appraisal can be used to map local priorities and understandings of issues.

In the mid-term, participatory appraisal should be an ongoing cycle of research, learning and collective action.

The long-term goal of this approach is to empower and enable people to analyse and tackle their problems themselves.

Suitable participants
It is aimed at local community members in larger or smaller groups. Since not everyone has to meet at the same place or at the same time, it can involve a very large number of people without requiring a large venue.

A key principle of participatory appraisal is to ask ‘Who is not participating?’ and to ensure that the process actively includes members of the community who are not normally involved in consultations.

Cost
It can be expensive at first, as it is very important that people running the process are properly trained in participatory appraisal approaches and values.

However, if local community members learn the approaches themselves and become more confident, the costs of hiring external help may be reduced.

Time requirements
To get the most out of participatory appraisal, it should be an ongoing process.

What it can deliver
Use participatory appraisal when you:

• are willing to let the community take control
• want to base your actions on local knowledge
• want to reach out to very diverse members of a community.
Participatory appraisal can deliver:

- empowered participants
- better relationships between participant groups
- reliable and valid mapping of local knowledge and priorities
- action and energy
- decisions.

What it cannot deliver
Do not use participatory appraisal when you want rapid results.

Strengths
- Participatory appraisal can be extremely inclusive, flexible and empowering, if run well.
- The knowledge produced by local community researchers has proved to be highly reliable, and can help to identify and tackle underlying issues to problems rather than just the symptoms.
- When local community members have been trained to facilitate a process, this capacity remains within the community for the future.
- It is a creative and flexible approach that can complement and draw on other techniques as and when needed throughout the process.
- It can draw on participatory arts and drama techniques to reach particular groups or explore particular issues.

Weaknesses
- Do not underestimate the need for training and experience among those running the process.
- It can be expensive to set up.
- To be truly effective, a participatory appraisal exercise will need more time than a one-off event. This might be difficult to fund and organise.
- It can be challenging and time-consuming to collate material from numerous events.

Origin
Participatory appraisal was developed in Africa and Asia and is used across the globe. This has led to a confusing multitude of acronyms used to describe it, e.g. PLA (participatory learning and action) and PRA (participatory rural appraisal). We have chosen to use the term ‘participatory appraisal’ because it is commonly used in the UK.
Participatory budgeting

**Description**
Participatory budgeting is an umbrella term covering a variety of mechanisms that delegate power or influence over local budgets, investment priorities and economic spending to citizens.

Participatory budgeting involves citizens directly in making decisions about budget issues, either on a small scale at the service or neighbourhood level or more strategically at a city or state level.

In practice, the power delegated to the citizens in the decision processes varies, from providing decision-makers with information about citizen preferences to processes that place parts of the budget under direct citizen control.

In general, the amount of power devolved has tended to be larger in Latin America (where participatory budgeting was developed) than in Europe or North America.

The scale of citizen participation has ranged from single neighbourhoods to an entire state (with populations of millions). Discussions are often limited to new investment rather than discussing spending as a whole. It can be run as a one-off process, but long-term benefits, such as social capital and ownership, require a recurring, cyclical process.

The ‘classic’ participatory budgeting model as developed in Brazil makes use of area meetings where all citizens can attend and determine the spending of local budgets (which are based on population and poverty levels). Citizens also elect representatives to attend larger, city-wide meetings, where more wide-ranging priorities are determined.

Peer grant-giving has also been carried out under the banner of participatory budgeting. This allows a group of citizens to assign grants for community projects and other spending.

**Uses**
Participatory budgeting provides citizens with direct or indirect influence over budget development, prioritisation and/or decisions.

**Suitable participants**
Participatory budgeting can be done with both direct participation of citizens and through directly elected citizen representatives. The larger, city-wide processes often combine the two, with direct participation at neighbourhood level where representatives are elected for city-wide forums.

The total number of participants in all meetings in city-wide processes can be tens of thousands. In the UK, the numbers have tended to be more modest, in the hundreds at most.

**Cost**
Participatory budgeting is often undertaken to increase efficiency in the budget (thus saving money). However, the process of citizen involvement in budgets is itself costly. Setting up a city-wide infrastructure of forums and meetings requires a large investment of money and staff time (potentially running into millions of pounds). Processes run at the local level around a particular service or neighbourhood can be cheaper, but still require substantial commitment to work.

**Time requirements**
It is possible to run a participatory budgeting exercise as a one-day, one-off event. However, the main benefits of participatory budgeting in terms of increased trust and citizen empowerment only develop over time. Ideally, participatory budgeting should form a continuous part of the budget cycle, ensuring that citizens feel assured that their efforts will not be wasted.
What it can deliver
Use participatory budgeting when you want:

- to get citizens directly involved in determining how to spend public money
- citizen input into spending priorities
- to increase your understanding of local needs
- to increase the public’s awareness of the trade-offs involved in the budget.

Participatory budgeting can:

- deliver increased transparency
- re-establish the legitimacy of government budget decisions
- build the skills and awareness of participants through the process of deliberation.

By being exposed to the trade-offs surrounding financial decisions, participants can acquire a deeper understanding of the work of government. The fact that participatory budgeting often involves control over actual resources can be a catalyst for civic mobilisation, especially in poorer areas. For example, in Porto Alegre, Brazil (the city with the longest-running participatory budgeting process), there has been a significant reallocation of resources towards spending in poorer areas as well as increased efficiency and reduced corruption as a result of participatory budgeting.

What it cannot deliver
Do not use participatory budgeting when:

- you are unwilling to delegate any real power to participants
- the trade-offs involved are extremely technical and are not of interest to the general public
- you are looking for a one-off project.

Strengths
- Participatory budgeting involves decisions about spending and devolving real power.
- It can be a very public process, which conveys legitimacy beyond the immediate participants.

Weaknesses
- Participatory budgeting can create unrealistic expectations among participants, if managed badly.
- It works best where there are high levels of community activism to begin with.
- It can undermine the role of elected representatives in certain situations.
- It does not work well where central targets and restricted budgets limit the amount of power that can be given to citizens.
- In most processes, meetings are open to all, creating the risk of certain groups dominating the proceedings. However, research into participatory budgeting in Brazil shows that the poorest neighbourhoods have actually been the more active participants. This can probably be linked to the fact that poorer neighbourhoods feel a more pressing need for improved services.

Origin
Participatory budgeting was developed in local government in Brazil in the late 1980s. Since then, participatory budgeting concepts and mechanisms have spread throughout Latin America and the rest of the world. Independently, similar methods have been developed in other countries, such as India.
Blogs

Description
The word ‘blog’ is derived from the term ‘web log’. Blogs are online journals or noticeboards where individuals or organisations can provide commentary and critique on news or specific subjects, such as politics, food or local events. Some blogs function like personal online diaries.

Blogs provide a quick and informal way to disseminate information to the wider public or specific groups. Most blogs allow readers to comment on the content, so the blog can become the focus for a continued discussion among site visitors. Blogs can play an important role in public engagement alongside more involving processes. Most blogs are displayed in reverse chronological order, i.e. the most recent first.

Uses
Blogs provide space for online discussion and comment and critique on news, places, people and objects.

Suitable participants
Blogs can be targeted at any groups. However, they rely on people having the necessary technology and skills to go online. Some groups are therefore excluded from accessing blogs.

Cost
• Varies.

• Blogs run by individuals can be completely free, as there are a number of sites that provide free hosting for blogs.

• However, someone has to update them, which takes time and has associated costs (such as paying someone to keep the blog updated, the cost of a domain name and hosting, buying a platform such as Wordpress, and paying for a unique banner). These costs are manageable and should not stop anyone from setting up a blog.

• There might also be design and branding costs associated with organisational blogs.

• Blogs have the potential to save money, by reducing the need for other forms of communication.

Time requirements
A blog represents an ongoing commitment. Without regular updates, the blog is unlikely to gain a wide readership. Updating the blog can be surprisingly time-consuming, especially if the posts need to conform to organisational communications policies.
What it can deliver
Use a blog to:
• increase discussion and debate on issues
• increase awareness of issues.

What it cannot deliver
A blog cannot deliver:
• decision-making
• deliberation or considered debate
• empowered participants.

Strengths
• A blog is open and transparent, although often anonymous.
• It allows anyone to contribute – and in their own time.
• It allows different views to be aired and discussed.
• Some bloggers have become famous in their own right.
• It engages people who may not normally be involved in face-to-face consultations.

Weaknesses
• There can be offensive, personal, pointless and inappropriate comments written in response to blogs.
• Content may need to be moderated.
• People may need to be encouraged to contribute to the website and to post their comments.
• Blogs rarely allow people to participate actively beyond responding to existing posts.

Origin
Blogs developed as a way of creating more interactive and relevant websites in the 1990s.
Virtual worlds

Description
Virtual worlds are chatrooms and communities which exist in an online simulated environment. A virtual world produces visual representations of places and practices.

Individuals can log on as an avatar (a stylised graphical representation of the user) and participate online in social, business and educational gatherings – just as they can in the real (offline) world.

Virtual worlds offer the possibility of real-time public engagement, joining people across a borough or district (or even across the world) in a 3-D virtual space similar to real life.

Uses
Virtual worlds are used in teaching, presentations, deliberation, and public meetings where physical access is an issue.

Suitable participants
Virtual worlds are suitable for young people and those already involved in new social media circles.

Cost
• Low-cost or free.
• If creating a permanent, thoroughly customised virtual space, it may require some technical work from a qualified expert.

Time requirements
This depends very much on the complexity of the event (i.e. whether an existing space is to be used or whether it is to be modified substantially for the purposes of the event). It takes a few days to send invitations, and can be time-consuming if constructing a dedicated virtual space to explore the issue.

What they can deliver
Virtual worlds can be used:
• to construct interactive educational exhibitions
• for online public meetings
• to increase awareness
• as a space for deliberation.

What they cannot deliver
Although free, access can be an issue. It is not advisable to use virtual worlds when seeking the input or collaboration of disadvantaged groups or older people.

Strengths
• Visual presentations can be given, which can be more effective than real-life presentations: this is particularly useful for disseminating complex information.
• Virtual worlds can be used to hold a simulated public meeting.
• Virtual worlds are already popular with educational institutions and businesses.
• They have more of an ‘involvement’ factor than a text-based chatroom – thus greater potential to create and sustain an online community.

Weaknesses
• Virtual worlds are difficult to facilitate.
• They require a dedicated graphics card.
• They are often associated with a small ‘gaming’ subculture and are not yet a mainstream way of communicating online.
• Their game-like appearance might be seen to trivialise some issues.
21st Century Town Meetings

Description
These are forums that involve a large number of citizens (between 500 and 5,000) in deliberating on local, regional or national issues. They use modern technology, including wireless voting pads and networked laptops, and combine the benefits of small-scale, face-to-face discussions with those of large-group decision-making.

This methodology has managed to overcome the common trade-off between the quality of discussion and size of group involved through innovative use of technology.

During the event, participants engage in group discussions at tables of 10–12, working with an independent facilitator who uses a networked computer to instantly collate ideas and votes from the table. This information is sent via a wireless network to a central point, where a theme team distils comments from all tables into themes that can be presented back to the room for comment or votes. Each participant has an electronic keypad, which allows them to vote individually on themes or questions. The results of these votes (often involving thousands of people) are presented in real time on large video screens for instant feedback to participants.

This ‘back and forth’ between the small- and large-scale dialogues is powerful, as it allows participants to discuss the issues in a small, manageable setting, while maintaining the link to a larger group. The immediacy of the vote creates transparency during the meeting.

The computers and voting pads generate volumes of useful demographically sortable data. This information is often quickly edited into a report, which is printed and given to participants, decision-makers and journalists at the end of the event.

Uses
These meetings have been used to create recommendations around a number of different issues, including: what to do with the site of the destroyed Twin Towers in New York; how to rebuild New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina; and finding solutions for healthcare in California.

They are especially useful for engaging citizens in planning, resource allocation and policy formulation.

They are a big commitment and are therefore only really suitable where real change can happen as a result of the process.

Suitable participants
Most events are open to all citizens, although it is often necessary to target hard-to-reach sectors of the population, to ensure a balanced and representative group of participants.

One of the key distinguishing features of 21st Century Town Meetings is the high number of participants involved, while maintaining a deep and meaningful discussion and an overview of what the participants think.

The scale of the meetings means that they often generate substantial interest from the media and public authorities.

Cost
• High.

• A 21st Century Town Meeting is a very intensive process. The individual tables need to be run by skilled facilitators. The voting pads, laptops and other technology required increase the cost as well.

• Designing, planning and co-ordinating an event involving hundreds or even thousands of people requires a substantial budget of tens of thousands of pounds.
**Time requirements**

- High.

- The scale of the events and the amount of information generated which needs to be themed, distilled into key themes and presented back to the room requires a lot of staff time and planning.

- The high profile of most 21st Century Town Meetings means that there are additional tasks around liaising with the media and decision-makers.

**What it can deliver**

Use a 21st Century Town Meeting when:

- the process can make an impact on the issue under discussion

- you have the budget and capacity to deliver such a large-scale event

- you want to engage a large number of participants without compromising the quality of the deliberation.

They can deliver:

- clear recommendations and decisions

- clear data on what different groups think about an issue before and after deliberation

- a deep and constructive discussion despite large groups being involved

- a compelling event, which can capture the imagination of the media and the public more widely.

**What it cannot deliver**

Do not use a 21st Century Town Meeting:

- unless the issue selected is sufficiently ‘ripe’ to allow the process to have an impact on real and current policy and/or resource decisions

- if you do not have credibility with citizens and decision-makers

- unless you can get a diverse group of participants to attend, including commonly marginalised groups.

**Strengths**

- The 21st Century Town Meeting combines large numbers of participants with considered dialogue.

- They gather clear and instant information on what participants think about an issue, including demographic data on what different groups feel.

- The immediacy and scale of the event can energise participants.

**Weaknesses**

- High cost.

- The 21st Century Town Meeting can raise expectations to unrealistic levels, if not managed well.

- They are reliant on technology.

**Origin**

The 21st Century Town Meeting ‘deliberative democracy’ methodology was developed by the US non-profit organisation AmericaSpeaks in 1997. Since then, AmericaSpeaks has delivered 21st Century Town Meetings in more than 30 US states and in other countries. 21st Century Town Meetings are trademarked by AmericaSpeaks.
Webcasting

Description
A webcast is a way of making video available from a website, either to be played immediately or for users to download and play at a time that suits them.

Webcasting is a way of delivering recorded and/or live audio and video content over the internet or an intranet.

You can also add media to a webcast, such as agendas and minutes that can be read alongside the video. If the webcast is an archived one, users will be able to skip to the relevant part of the video.

Uses
Live events, such as council meetings, are broadcast to online users as they happen in ‘real time’. After the event, the content can be made available for access at any time as ‘on-demand’ webcasts.

Content can also be pre-recorded and webcast ‘as live’. This is a useful technique when rehearsal or editing is needed before the content goes live.

Suitable participants
The advantage of this method is that anyone with an internet connection (of broadband speed) is able to access the webcast at a time and in a location that is entirely suitable to them.

Webcasting is also interactive. Users can send in comments and questions via a text tool while the webcast is running, and get an answer straight away. Webcasts can also take place from any location, as long as the broadcaster has a computer with the right permissions as well as the necessary software and hardware (such as a webcam and a microphone).

Cost
Low – the main advantage of webcasting is the cost. Webcasting your council meetings may mean an initial outlay of a few thousand pounds, but after that, the only outlays are bandwidth costs and support agreements.

Time requirements
After the initial setting up of the website and apparatus, then it should require relatively little time to set up the equipment and transfer to the website on each occasion.

What it can deliver
- It could be argued that such a method helps to make council meetings much more transparent – and local government decisions easier to understand as a result.
- It allows people the opportunity to be engaged at a time and in a place that suits their own lifestyle and commitments.
- Using it for council meetings or for an organisation’s AGM when not all members can make a fixed time and date is the ideal occasion to use webcasting – to include everyone who is interested.

What it cannot deliver
- On its own, webcasting will not improve relations between local government and the people who live in the area, or the management of an organisation and its individual members.
- Webcasting would not be appropriate if the issues being discussed were of a sensitive nature or should only be discussed between a few people.
Practical examples of engagement methods

**Strengths**

- The main advantage of webcasting is the cost. If you were to try to broadcast council meetings on TV, the cost would run into many millions of pounds – something beyond the reach of most, if not all, local councils.

- In live webcasting, an obvious benefit is the increase in transparency and accountability that comes with allowing more people to access council meetings, for instance.

- Webcasting allows what could be seen as dry and technical content to be explained in a number of more interactive and engaging ways, thus increasing the potential number of parties interested in the content.

**Weaknesses**

- As with all online methods, the content can only be accessed by people with access to broadband speed internet. Despite this, the increase in broadband penetration indicates that this will potentially become a less significant issue in the future.

**Origin**

At the end of the 1980s and in the early 1990s, a number of individuals and organisations in the US started to experiment with streaming audio and video content on the internet. More recently, webcasts such as NetAid in 1999 and Live8 in 2008 stand out as examples of how popular and accessible webcasting has become.
Community engagement – case studies

If you would like to find out more about the case studies featured, please visit www.ageuk.org.uk for contact details of local Age UKs.
Louth and District Seniors’ Forum – in it for the long haul

In April 2010, members of the Louth and District Seniors’ Forum in Lincolnshire celebrated – along with residents, councillors and officers of local councils – the launch of a long-awaited Louth town bus service. It was the culmination of efforts that began many years before.

Research into what was involved in getting a town bus, what the costs were and what funding sources were possible was undertaken by a Seniors’ Forum member in 2005, by investigating similar services in surrounding towns. Informal two-way contact with county council transport officers was established and resulted in them speaking on the subject of rural public transport at several open meetings run by the Seniors’ Forum in the following years.

In 2007, members of the forum and other local people also met the chair of the Government’s Commission for Rural Communities. In the same year, the Seniors’ Forum campaigned at every opportunity when a local bus service was suddenly threatened with being axed.

However, it was the fight to save the ‘Number 41’ bus that proved to be the catalyst for more concerted action locally. This focus on bus services prompted two forum members to work out a route for a town bus, which would serve the residents of the whole town better. They called it the ‘Nippy Little Bus’ – it seemed only a pipe dream!

They emailed the route to a few councillors that day. At a meeting of town, district and county councillors at a local area committee meeting the following evening, they were surprised to find photocopies of their map on all the chairs. They were even more surprised to be asked if they would like the committee’s help to take forward this town bus idea.

Established and chaired by a councillor from East Lindsey District Council, the Bus Roundtable was set up in November 2007. It comprised key players, including local councillors, council officers, residents, representatives of bus companies and various local groups, including the Seniors’ Forum.

A questionnaire was devised, distributed and analysed, to determine what was needed in the different parts of the town. Many meetings of the Bus Roundtable later, and more crucially following negotiations between key transport people behind the scenes, the forum heard in 2010 that the new town service, based roughly on the map that it had produced in 2007, was to become a reality.

It’s not a pipe dream now – it’s a 16-seater town bus called the ‘Louth Nipper’. Just as well they were prepared to be in it for the long haul. Now they just need to get the message out to people to ‘use it or lose it’.

Morag Judd, Committee member Louth and Seniors District Forum, provided an update about the bus service in August 2011: “The Nipper bus is still going strong and the service is much appreciated especially by older residents. There were some tense moments as services were considered for cutting but we were elated that the Nipper sees another year of service”.

Morag Judd, Committee member Louth and Seniors District Forum, provided an update about the bus service in August 2011: “The Nipper bus is still going strong and the service is much appreciated especially by older residents. There were some tense moments as services were considered for cutting but we were elated that the Nipper sees another year of service”.

Community engagement – case studies 51
Age Concern Herefordshire & Worcestershire (ACH&W – now Age UK Herefordshire & Worcestershire) attends the Older People’s Forum set up by Worcestershire County Council. The older people who attend this forum are all white, apart from the ACH&W development officer.

Following discussion with the chief executive of ACH&W and the county council, it was agreed that the development officer would develop a separate BME (black and minority ethnic) Elders Forum as a means of bringing together BME older people to be able to contribute to the county council’s new strategy on improving the dignity and quality of life for older people in Worcestershire. She would also continue to attend the Older People’s Forum.

ACH&W’s ‘Improving Reach’ programme got involved and took the opportunity to invite other people (some older and some younger) from BME communities, including gypsy and traveller groups, and from lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender groups from across the county to get involved in providing feedback on seven national health and social care outcomes, and to identify priorities in each area – for example, developing new services, reforming services or developing improved joint working.

The seven outcomes are:
- improved health and wellbeing
- improved quality of life
- making a positive contribution
- increased choice and control
- freedom from discrimination and harassment
- economic wellbeing
- maintaining personal dignity and respect.

An initial consultation event was very well received. The older people who use the services felt that they benefited from being consulted on their views about how services could be improved, as their input could help to improve the services not just for themselves, but for others as well. Encouraging older people to have a voice and to express their views offers recognition and a feeling of being valued in society.

A follow-up meeting with the same group has been organised, to see whether the views and suggestions expressed at the first meeting have been taken up by health and social care professionals. The group is keen to ensure that the service providers are not just ‘paying lip service’ to tackling the issues that they identified.

ACH&W also supports another BME older people’s group, which is contributing to the development of the local cancer strategy for 2010–14.
Age Concern North-West Cumbria – in their own words

A Community Research Service run by Age Concern North-West Cumbria (now Age UK West Cumbria) provides a new model for engagement, as older people are involved both as participants and as researchers. Older volunteers interview local older people either one-to-one or in small groups for consultation and evaluation processes going on in their area that are being run by the county council, district council or primary care trust.

Since the project began in 2006, 20 older people have been involved as researchers and nearly 300 have been interviewed.

Projects include:

• consultations on the future funding of social care, on the Older People’s Commissioning Strategy, and on the county council’s regeneration initiative

• evaluations of telecare services, ‘Moneywise’ services, the Healthy Communities Initiative and the Rural Community Development project.

Age Concern North-West Cumbria’s Research Service is also unique in that it is moving towards sustainability, earning an income from the research work it undertakes and therefore becoming less reliant on short-term funding.

Age Concern Cambridgeshire – innovative consultation techniques

As part of its role in encouraging older people to be involved in local consultation processes, Age Concern Cambridgeshire (now Age UK Cambridgeshire) has developed innovative methods to encourage the involvement of local older people.

For example, it helped older people to feed into the county council’s consultation on self-directed support, by using a local drama group to help older people to understand the key policy initiatives, such as personal budgets. The drama group helped to illustrate what it would actually be like to have a personal budget, which meant that older people who saw it were better able to comment.
Age Concern Leicester – BME Elders Forum

Age Concern Leicester (now Age UK Leicester Shire & Rutland) started the BME Elders Forum to address the problem of BME elders’ voices not being heard within the community and not contributing to local decision-making.

Age Concern Leicester found that BME elders disproportionately experienced a number of barriers which discourage their engagement, including lack of confidence, lack of understanding of public bodies, complex consultation processes and scepticism about the impact of these processes.

The forum now brings together older people from Leicester’s many BME communities, including Chinese, Polish, African-Caribbean, Somalian and South Asian communities. It is self-governing, with members making their own decisions about what they discuss and get involved in, with the support of Age Concern Leicester staff.

The forum has helped Age Concern Leicester to be more in tune with diverse local communities and to understand and respond better to their particular needs, for example, through increased outreach work with communities and more effective referral practices.

Age Concern Leicester has also helped the BME Elders Forum to apply for funding for projects, and the forum is currently involved in a one-year project funded by the Equality and Human Rights Commission to empower and enable BME elders to be more confident and to express their views.

The forum also has good relationships with local decision-making bodies, such as the local authority and primary care trust. Both have invited members of the forum to sit on advisory groups, such as the University Hospitals of Leicester Service Equality Panel and the Older Persons Strategic Stakeholder Group. Other members of the forum channel views and opinions through the representative, by providing feedback at forum meetings on key topics, such as hospital food.
Age Concern Norfolk – consultation on day services standards

Age Concern Norfolk (now Age UK Norfolk) engaged older service users to design the standards for its day services. Participants were recruited through face-to-face invitations, which gave Age Concern Norfolk staff the opportunity to explain the project and to reassure any anxieties people had about involvement. This was important, to ensure that people who were less experienced and less comfortable with expressing their opinion were involved. The process involved four groups of six to eight people who met over a series of two-hour sessions to discuss the proposed standards.

The project found that older people wanted standards phrased and implemented in a way that expressed how day service users would experience those aspects of the service. They also emphasised the importance of time for socialising at day services, as well as trust and confidentiality in staff members, because for many older people it was important to feel that they could confide in them.

West Suffolk Older People’s Panel – VOICE

The VOICE project was set up in West Suffolk in 2003 to improve health and social care consultation with older people, particularly those who are least likely to have their voices heard.

The project manager carries out interviews with older volunteers across West Suffolk on key issues and then produces reports which are circulated to local decision-makers. The one-to-one format means that the project can involve people who are least likely to be engaged in more standard consultation routes, such as frail older people, those lacking capacity and those who are housebound. Currently, over 85 older people are available for interview for this project.

The VOICE project has interviewed and reported on a range of issues affecting older people, such as Individual Budgets, day care provision, ‘Choose and Book’ services, end-of-life care, and primary care access and responsiveness.

As a result of the report on primary care, which found that older people needed more time with their GP, the primary care trust (PCT) has changed its policies, so that older people can request double appointments. Generally, the project has meant that local decision-makers are listening to the views of older people, whereas this did not happen before.

The project has been particularly successful, because numerous key stakeholders, such as the PCT and the county council, have made long-term commitments to ensure its success – both in terms of funding and in terms of general support, by being involved in the steering group, by being involved in events and by referring to the reports produced. This has also meant that the project has had time to become established and to gain the awareness and trust of local older people.

This project is still ongoing. For more information, please contact claire.rose@ageuk.org.uk
Useful resources
Engaging with Older People: Evidence review – for more information, contact Susan Davidson, Research Adviser, Age UK Influencing Division: susan.davidson@ageuk.org.uk

Radio Toolkit: Running a station for the over-50s – for more information, contact John Cotcher, National Radio Broadcasting Development Officer, Age UK Services Division: john.cotcher@ageuk.org.uk

Involve, Engage, Empower Toolkit – for more information, contact Matthew Pilkington, Information and Advice National Development Officer, Age UK Services Division: matthew.pilkington@ageuk.org.uk

Change One Thing Campaign – Mary Milne, Senior Campaigns Officer, Age UK Campaigns & Influencing Division (see www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/campaign/improving-neighbourhoods-change-one-thing)

Going the Extra Mile: The impact of specialist Older People’s Warden Projects (available from the Age UK website) – for more information, contact Alex Rogacewicz, Development Officer, Neighbourhood Wardens, Age UK Services Division: alexandra.rogacewicz@ageuk.org.uk

Voice and Choice Training – Janette Allen, Training Co-ordinator, Age UK Training (for enquiries, please phone Janette Allen on 01543 503 660 or email janette.allen@ageuk.org.uk)

www.peopleandparticipation.net provides practical information for those working to involve people

Policy Research Institute on Ageing and Ethnicity: www.priae.org.uk


Being an older lesbian, gay or bisexual person: www.ageuk.org.uk/health-wellbeing/relationships-and-family/older-lesbian-gay-and-bisexual


Later Matters Older People Manifesto – available from www.brap.org.uk or by calling them on 0121 456 7400